

All the Best Painting of Jesus

Day-drinking naps give me the best dreams, and this one's no different. I'm with Renee, a figure I'm still connected to in a weird, offensive way. In my dream, though, it's all honeymoon. She's unzipping my pants, about to do something marvelous, when a knock rattles my bedroom window.

I throw the blanket off and pull back the curtain. It's not yet dark but soon will be. Rain slashes against the building. Wind whips a fast food wrapper stuck in a branch and ruffles my neighbor's makeshift garbage bag car window. Nothing out of the ordinary. Probably just a branch rubbing against the siding. I'm turning back to bed when I hear it again. It's more of a persistent tapping than a knock. I look outside and see the same. Then I look down and there's my father standing on the sill, no bigger than a baby squirrel, half-drowned and shivering. I open the window.

"Christ, dad, what're you doing? I mean...how?" I bring him inside, cradling him in my hand.

"You thought throwing some dirt on me would get rid of me." His shivering makes my hand shake. I use two hands like you would a communion wafer.

"Usually that does the trick. Twelve years, why now? And how'd you get so small?"

“Boy, get me some dry clothes. You want me to catch pneumonia?”

I glance around, bewildered. “Clothes? There’s nothing to fit you.” I carry him into the bathroom and set him on the counter. I shut the door. “We’ve got to be careful. I’ve got a cat.”

He looks at the red hair dryer pushed against the corner of the vanity. “You must got yourself a woman, too.”

I laugh. “Don’t you recognize it? It’s yours.” I tell him to strip.

Plaid shirt and his favorite jeans—the clothes he was buried in. Dad never was a suit man. He pulls his shirt over his head, unbuttons his jeans and shimmies out.

“But you don’t have enough hair.”

I pat my buzz cut. “I know. But I had trouble getting rid of your stuff after...you know. I’ve kept most of it. Every time I take a piss, there it is reminding me of you. Call me sentimental I guess.”

Dad still has great hair, flowing loose curls like all the best paintings of Jesus. With his blue eyes, broad shoulders and big hands, there was never a shortage of bar hags crashing at our house growing up. But it’s hard to make out these details now on account of his stature.

I plug in the blow dryer, set it to warm at the slowest speed. I put my left hand behind his back so he won’t scud off the vanity. “Okay. Turn.” After I finish drying his backside, I switch the thing to the faster speed and dry off his clothes. “They feel good now.” I hand them back.

“Why were you in bed so early?” He slides his arm into the sleeve.

“I’m doing some babysitting. Just resting up a little before Renee brings her boy over. He’s very active.” Of course I don’t tell him about the day drinking.

“The kid’s not yours?” Dad pushes the button through the last hole on his shirt.

“Nah.” I hold my hand out for him to step on.

“Then who is this Renee?”

“My ex-girlfriend.”

“Why the fuck are you volunteering to watch her kid?”

“It’s complicated. I worked for her dad as a salesman at his furniture store. He fired me two weeks ago saying business sucked, yet I outsold Renee every week. He just didn’t want me there anymore, staring at his daughter like some lovesick clown. Plus he might’ve heard me call her a slut when I discovered she was sleeping with the warehouse guy. Anyhow, he never mailed my final check. I can’t reach him because him and the Mrs. are on a cruise. Renee said she’d drop it off if I watched her son for a few hours.”

I carry dad into the living room. Pusser, my eighteen pound tabby, is lying on the couch. “That’s going to be a problem.”

“You told me you had a cat, not a mountain lion.”

I set dad on the armrest farthest from Pusser. I scoop up Pusser and carry her to the spare bedroom and shut the door. His clothes, his tools, his high school wrestling trophies; it’s all in there. I hear Pusser knocking into things, things falling down.

“What’s all that racket?”

“Nothing. It’s just Pusser being Pusser.” I offer dad a beer, figuring things are different now, but he waves me off. With dad still on the wagon, I feel funny about boozing in front of him, but this is my apartment. Am I not a grown-ass man? I grab a beer for me and a bottle of water for him. I grab a few slices of imitation cheese while I’ve got the fridge open.

Dad has the remote on the sofa cushion, hopping up and down on the power button.

“You’re wasting your energy. The cable got shut off.”

He looks at the blank TV. “How do you entertain yourself?”

I pull my phone from my pajama pocket and blow his mind. When dad had passed, flip phones had just been invented. I find Key & Peele on YouTube. We laugh our asses off.

“Phones are televisions. Unbelievable. What else have I missed?”

“Not much.”

“Not much,” he mocks me. “You’ve got phones that are televisions—televisions!”

“I mean, yeah, we’ve got these tricked out phones, but everything’s gotten fake because of it. People don’t want to hang out anymore. Kids just sit around and type messages to each other.” I scroll through Renee’s text messages to demonstrate.

“Damn. She didn’t have the lady nuts to break up in person?”

“I know. Ridiculous considering I worked with her. I give her seven months of my life and this is what I get in return. A goddamn text.”

Dad presses different icons on my phone. I let him play around with it for a bit until he clicks on photo gallery. I take my phone back, unsure whether I deleted all the pics I sent Renee back when we were screwing all the time. I get back on my soapbox.

“All people do is showboat, posting pictures of their new house, new car, new abs, new butt lift, their kid’s perfect report card. And they’re always going on and on about how *blessed* they are. It’s so damn phony. It makes me want to puke. We’re all eating shit sandwiches breakfast, lunch and dinner, but no one will cop to it.”

Dad scratches right below where his hair hangs down on his neck. “What’s this posting pictures?”

I click on the Facebook app. My last posting was from two months ago, a selfie of me and Renee in front of a Lamborghini at a car show. “There’s this thing called a Like button—see

it? People try to get as many Likes as possible.” I can tell dad’s not following. “Look, it’s not worth explaining.”

I go back to YouTube, scroll through some recently loaded videos. I hit play on one called Chicken vs. Gorilla. Two grown men—I assume they’re men—dressed in costumes are beating the shit out of each other.

Dad tilts the phone to see better. “So what’s this thing you’re showing me?”

“YouTube. What it is, you shoot a video and upload it to this site for the world to see.”

“And people Like this, too?”

“Yes.” I point to the thumbs up button. “Or if you don’t like it, you press this one.” I point to the number displayed beneath the video. “This tells you how many views the video has. When you get enough people watching, companies wave money at you to play their ads. That’s why we had to watch that truck commercial before the video.”

We sit quietly, enjoying the action. It looks like chicken is done after gorilla lands a left hook, but when gorilla charges in for the double-leg, chicken times a beautiful knee to gorilla’s nose, laying him out.

The doorbell rings. I check the time. “She’s not supposed to be here for another hour.” I pan the room, figuring where to hide dad. “Here, slide behind this throw pillow.” With dad out of sight, I open the door.

Renee’s wearing red lipstick. Her winter coat hides the hem of her dress, skirt—I can’t tell. Knowing Renee, whatever she’s wearing won’t be on long. Spike hides behind her; she’s got to push him through the door. “Say hi to Uncle Kevin.”

I tussle the little guy’s moppy brown hair, then deadeye Renee. “You said seven-thirty.”

“Yeah, I’m early. So what?” She turns to leave.